Women’s Tanci Fiction in Late Imperial and Early Twentieth-Century China

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Chapter Six

Illustrating a New Woman in *Fengliu zuiren* (The Valiant and The Culprit)

Continuing the exploration of women's *tanci* fiction in the modern period, this last chapter studies the Shanghainese writer Jiang Yingqing, whose portrayal of the modern woman in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai attests to the continuing development of the tradition of women's written *tanci* in the late imperial period. During the interwar years (1920-1937), Shanghai witnessed a polemical historical period in which competing discourses on China's national identity shaped the public image of modern Chinese women and their societal roles. From the contentious social-cultural discourses of this period, the ideal of female citizenship emerged as a nascent model of feminine social and political identity (see Liu, Huiying 156-80). Jiang's *Fengliu zuiren* (The Valiant and the Culprit) employs the traditional *tanci* as a narrative vessel to disseminate modern ideals of female citizenship and, subsequently, innovative visions of women's social and political agency. In the early twentieth century, women's public participation in the anti-Qing rebellion and the founding of the New Republic carved out a public space in which a collective political identity of women could be envisioned and developed. Responding to contemporary feminist discourses, Jiang's text suggests that a woman's emancipation should be achieved through constructive relationships with her personal identity, her community, and the nation. The heroine Jia Tuanhua travels to the West and comes back to work as a doctor. Ambitious to contribute to the benefit of her people, she rejects the male protagonist's marriage proposal; he, contrary to the independent heroine, is yoked by a conventional marriage arranged by his family and eventually abandons his personal ambition. The narrative's forward-looking portrayal of a self-determined heroine represents the social and cultural discourses about women and work in 1920s China, highlighting women's self-empowerment through intellectual undertakings and the pursuit of social freedom.

Published first as a newspaper series from 1924-1925, Jiang's *tanci*, 社會之花 (*Shehui zhi hua*, Flower of the Society), brings to light the author's conscious exploration of a larger audience community for traditional *tanci*. Herself a teacher at a women's school in Shanghai, Jiang uses familial tales to suggest women's new
social agency, and adapts traditional *tanci* conventions to the modern era. In traditional *tanci*, authors oftentimes portray women achieving imaginative freedom by cross-dressing and taking on men's social roles. However, women's social mobility in these traditional *tanci* is constrained by the resolution of the plot, which frequently involves the heroine's return to her feminine identity in the domestic sphere. In contrast with these earlier *tanci*, Jiang's work appraises the vexed relationship between gender and modernization and projects a vision of women's identity that takes into account the innovative societal roles open to women during the interwar period.

The story begins with a scene at the beautiful West Lake in the southern city of Hangzhou. A libertine, Gu Tan (古檀), taking a leisurely stroll, meets the beautiful Jia Tanhua, falls in love with her, and subsequently schemes with matchmaker Wang Sansao (汪三嫂) to seduce her. Tanhua is a young woman born into a wealthy family, whose parents are already deceased. Like many elite women of her time, Tanhua receives a modern education and aspires to devote herself to women's education and freedom. In her exchanges and meetings with progressive intellectuals, she is attracted to Zhen Chaoying (甄超英), a young scholar who recently returned to China after his education at Hong Kong Queen's College and six years of study in London. Enamored by Tanhua's talent, beauty, and wisdom, Chaoying proposes to her. However, Tanhua, knowing that Chaoying's mother has arranged for him to marry a prosperous Shanghai businessman's daughter, Hong Qingjiao (洪青椒), declines Chaoying's proposal. Later, Tanhua travels to the United States to study medicine, then returns to Shanghai as the director of a hospital, devoting herself to the ill and impoverished. In the hospital, Tanhua re-encounters Gu Tan, who dies of syphilis due to his corrupted lifestyle. His pregnant girlfriend, who elopes with Gu Tan and stays in the hospital to wait for the birth of their child, is so heartbroken by Gu Tan's death that she dies with the unborn baby. Meanwhile, disheartened by Tanhua's rejection, the male protagonist Chaoying follows his mother's orders and marries Hong Qingjiao. Because Qingjiao loves the glamorous Shanghai, Chaoying moves there with her, hoping to find a job in a bank with his father-in-law's help. However, the couple falls into a series of family disputes due to Qingjiao's behavior, including her conflicts with Chaoying's conservative mother. Chaoying's unhappy marriage leads to the deterioration of his health. Near the end of the story, Chaoying meets Tanhua by accident while staying in her hospital as a patient. He has divorced his wife and now again proposes marriage to Tanhua. The heroine, determined to remain single and devote herself to her career, leaves Chaoying a long letter and departs for a journey overseas.

Tanhua is portrayed as an image of the modern woman through the unconventional gender and power relationships between her and Chaoying. The names of the male and female characters Jia Tanhua and Zhen Chaoying (甄超英) resonate with characters in Cao Xueqin's novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The antithesis of their personal destinies is underlined by their surnames, Jia, which puns on illusion or falsehood, and Zhen, which puns on truth or reality. This double entendre in names is frequently employed in Cao's novel to indicate characters of paradoxical destinations, such as the ill-fated scholar Zhen Shiyin (甄士隱, literally, truth
concealed), and the ambitious and later prospering character Jia Yucun (賈雨村, falsehood contained). Later in Cao's text, a minor character Zhen Baoyu (甄寶玉, which puns on real stone) steps on the stage and evokes a convoluted relation with the hero Jia Baoyu (false stone) (Gu 159). This contrast between truth and fiction, as Anthony C. Yu suggests, implies "the emptiness of fiction": "Just as the real world is considered empty and unreal in the Buddhist vision, so the invented world of story is 'baseless' (huangtang), 'absurd' (dahuang), 'unverifiable' (wuji), and 'undatable' (wu chaodai nianji)" (168). Jiang's tanci inherits this narrative antithesis of truth and fiction, but modifies the male and female characters' personal destinies considerably. In Cao's novel, Jia Baoyu flees the world and takes to Daoism at the collapse of his family, but then decides to pursue knowledge abroad and re-enter the world with an activist attitude. Zhen Chaoying, however, is an effeminate and passive hero who is unfulfilled in marriage and career and then falls seriously ill, akin to the sentimental and delicate heroine Lin Daiyu in Cao's novel. Tanhua, unlike the frail Daiyu, is a sagacious and self-educated modern woman who enjoys more social mobility and personal power. If Chaoying's illness is symbolic of China's ill society, Tanhua's hospital is a symbol of hope and regeneration, a personal effort to heal the nation and the people. The ending of the text, which might otherwise herald Tanhua's newfound power as a professional woman, the head of the hospital, is weighed down by the cultural pressures of a traditional society that is pitted against progressive women. This ending is foreshadowed in the name of Tanhua, which, punning on the popular saying "tanhua yixian" (as fleeting as the blossom of the epiphyllum flower), suggests the ephemerality of Tanhua's personal ideal.

The tensions between the personal and the social, the traditional and the modern are prominent in Jiang's personal life. Born in 1884, Jiang was educated at the Shanghai Women's School, one of the earliest educational institutions for women, and later taught at the Songjiang Women's School in Shanghai. Because of her talents in composing traditional poems and her expertise in tanci, she gained great popularity among the readers of the time. Jiang's husband Chen Zuotong (陳佐彤), poet and editor of her book 彈詞開篇集 (Tanci kaipian ji, Collected Tanci Introductory Songs), was a personal acquaintance of Wang Dungen (王鈍根), the chief editor of the prominent newspaper 申報 (Shenbao, Shanghai Journal). Through the connection with Wang, Jiang's writings were in dialogue with the literary societies to which ordinary women writers did not have easy access. A contemporary reader, when tracing Jiang's life trajectory, may find himself or herself unraveling multiple spaces of reality: accounts of Jiang's life by her male peers and her son, her husband's edited works of her texts, and her tanci published serially in Shehui zhi hua (Flower of the Society, 1924-1925). The newspaper, representing the voice of bourgeois intellectuals of the time, aimed at reforming social customs through education of the masses, although the editors declined to align with the leftist writers who became prominent after the May Fourth Movement. Some of its contributors, such as Zhou Shoujuan, identified themselves more with the so-called 鴛鴦蝴蝶派 (Yuanyang hudie pai, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School), and claimed an interconnection with traditional literature.
In her *tanci* composed for oral performance, Jiang’s depiction of the modern woman suggests disjuncture and inconsistency. Traditional tales of love and marriage are appropriated and rewritten, reflecting a negotiation between the public and personal. In the *tanci* song, "摩登女郎嘆" ("Modeng nülang tan," "Lament of A Modern Woman"), the narrator recounts in the first person the fall of a modern woman, a follower of "freedom in love" who regrets her choice when she suffers a broken marriage. The theme of 自由戀愛 (ziyou lian'ai, free love) was considered a feasible solution to the women's problem according to some contributors to 婦女雜誌 (Funü zazhi, Lady's Journal) in 1922. Jiang's *tanci*, however, departs from the ideal of free love and sexual emancipation promoted by progressive intellectuals, addressing the women's problem in a self-reflexive voice.

In the early years of Jiang's career, before she composed The Valiant and the Culprit, she published a voluminous work 玉鏡臺 (Yujingtai, Jade Terrace) in the format of traditional *tanci* fiction, which, despite its aesthetic achievement, did not meet with much commercial success. Jiang's later profound involvement with print media, however, assisted her in transforming the *tanci* genre into a medium through which diverse discourses on woman and selfhood could be facilitated, and thus prepared for the broad impact of The Valiant and the Culprit on readers. As Rebecca Karl argues, after 1895, China's journalism came to be appropriated as a mode of "political, intellectual, and social activism and advocacy" (Karl 540). Jiang's marriage with the newspaper publisher Chen Zuotong and her connections with progressive journalists such as Wang Dungen positioned her writings in a broad public forum and drew attention to them from a wide range of audiences. The Valiant and the Culprit was published under the subtitle of shishi *tanci*, or *tanci* of current events, suggesting the editor's effort to distinguish this *tanci* work from other traditional *tanci* and an editorial intent to tie the work to the journal's overall goal of social reform. In comparison with Hou Zhi, the Qing *tanci* author who was likewise engaged in the publishing field to advocate for women's writing, Jiang's involvement with print media could possibly have endowed her with more autonomy because of the evolved and more open social environment. The symbiotic relationship between the journal Flowers of the Society and Jiang's serial *tanci*, published under her own name, suggests that women authors were enjoying an unprecedented autonomy in the public sphere.

Some of Jiang's *tanci* songs are autobiographical, such as "十年前之我" ("Shinian qian zhi wo," "I Myself Ten Years' Ago"), "自笑" ("Zixiao," "Self-mockery"), "私語" ("Siyu," "Words in Private"), and "病榻的回顧" ("Bingta de huigu," "Reflections in Time of Illness"). These songs reveal Jiang's evolving notions of self and her need to find a space of self-expression. Her adaptation of traditional *tanci* exposes fissures in China's own protofeminist projects. In Jiang's *tanci* songs, one can find abundant examples of her urging women to transpose the Confucian model of women's familial service into the new realm of national service. She emphasizes women's inborn duty as mother, openly opposes divorce, and endorses a daughter's love to her parents. The primary question for Jiang, as her writings reveal, is when the Chinese
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woman is given the choice of adapting Western ways or joining the new global order, how definitively women should break with their own past.

The discrepancies in Jiang's representation of the modern woman reflect an anxiety characteristic of the new Chinese woman, whose identity oscillates between the fantasy of a nascent subjectivity and an internal resistance against homogenized identity. The above photo of Jiang dressed as an ancient beauty possibly implies an ambivalent stance toward modernity. The dress, hairstyle, and painted decorative strands around her arms are signifiers of tradition, yet her ambiguous image is even more enlarged by these details created by the photo. She becomes a "media-created" woman (Van Zoonen 66). Jiang Yingjiang's case reflects the "doubling-up" of the woman both as the object and subject of attention in feminist studies. The author is the subject and enunciator of feminist issues, and the receiver of the impact of feminist thinking, revealing the diverse meanings and contents ascribed to the term "modern woman."

In Jiang's tanci, the author's multivalent representations of republican women are centered around the heroine Jia Tanhua, who declines the male protagonist's marriage proposal, prioritizing her duty as a national citizen over becoming a good wife and mother. In the last years of the nineteenth century, Chinese reformers became convinced of the need to mobilize the energies of women to serve the nation and to nationalize women's education by borrowing from the educational initiatives of foreigners. Consequently, the government began to open its own private women's schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Custom, however, prohibited male instruction of female students. In many cases, men depended on women employees to conduct teaching and administrative duties.

The conceptions of Chinese female citizenship were formulated by cultural and political elites and framed by national and Social Darwinist concerns (Judge, "Citizens" 43). The rise of female citizenship was often mediated through examples of Western heroines in fin-de-siècle literature. However, women's political rights were construed as rights to act in the national rather than the personal interest. Late Qing reformists who advocated for women's rights were more concerned with providing women with the knowledge necessary to assume their national duties, rather than with promoting the right to education per se (Judge, "Citizens" 43).

In this historical context, how does the text refract women's citizenship through the representations of Tanhua, as well as diverse women characters? Does Tanhua's image represent continuity with classical feminine virtues in a mediated modern form, or does Tanhua, who aspires toward New Literature and who studied abroad, represent a continuation of the May Fourth tradition? What textual adaptations does Jiang make to change the traditional form of tanci into an effective medium to represent women's historical experiences and reveal social reality? The above questions provoke a recontextualization of the tanci genre and its relation to public media and women's political activism in the republican period. In this period, the new urban media played a pivotal role in the awakening of women who came to be prominent reformers and who were devoted to save fellow oppressed women. Many feminist journals were being published and circulated, including Women's Journal.
(1902), edited by Chen Xifen (1883-1923), and 中華女報 (Zhonghua nübao, Chinese Women's Periodical; 1907), edited by the feminist revolutionist Qiu Jin (1875-1907). These women's magazines conveyed new representations of womanhood through their pictorial covers and progressive content, defining women's newfound social roles as teachers, students, athletes, and social activists. Many progressive tanci were published in newspapers and journals. In giving voice to oppressed women, tanci writers critiqued the orthodox ideological forces that were perpetuating women's subordination, and they enacted in print the moral imperatives for social and self-transformation. Women's appropriation of the literary form of tanci created a new space for women writers, constructing a new social life for themselves as well as their largely female audience.

During this period, biographies of heroic women in both China and the West represent new ideals of womanhood channeled through sociopolitical discourses of the nation-state. These texts project the hybrid images of the new Chinese woman—and of the new Chinese nation—which were products of mutual transformations, paragons of possibilities, and contradictions which existed both within the local and between the local and global contexts (Judge, "Blended Wish Images" 105). "Late Qing authors claimed that the function of the Chinese and Western exemplars in turn-of-the-century texts corresponded to the dual objectives of modern Chinese nationalism: to preserve (or construct) an authentic Chinese cultural essence while securing China's place in the new international order of the nation-states" (Judge, "Blended Wish Images" 105). Particularly, early twentieth-century Chinese history witnesses the rise of "a new feminine-heroic subject" whose existence was "an effect of the early twentieth-century national crisis, and a mark of archeomodern and presentist responses to that crisis. Many of the new heroines considered their personal aspirations inseparable from broader national aspirations. This new ethos was, however, ridden with gender paradoxes. Heroines claimed their new historical role both as representative females and as surrogate males, simultaneously embracing and rejecting the identity of 'women'" (Judge, Precious Raft 198). This nascent female citizenship is well exemplified by the revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin, who writes in her poem "Mian nüquan" (Song for Women's Rights), "Ours is a generation that loves freedom, / we strive for freedom on one single cup of wine. / Equal rights for men and women are endowed by nature; / how then is it that you willingly live in subordination? / Outstanding women citizens must not fail to shoulder national responsibilities" (48). Qiu Jin's appeal toward women's responsibilities as national citizens can be contextualized in the history of late Qing and early Republic women's political revolution and social activism.

Thanks to women's public participation in the anti-Qing rebellion and the founding of the New Republic, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed women's successful campaigns for political equality and the development of a "space in which a sense of a legitimate women's political collective identity could develop" (Edwards, Gender 66). Women's suffrage movements made substantial progress and became an important constituent of the New Culture Movement (新文化運動)
from 1919 to 1923. The earliest branch of the progressive United Women's Association was founded in Shanghai in 1919, and later became supported by the newly formed Chinese Communist Party in 1921, renamed as 上海中華女界聯合會 (Shanghai zhonghua nüjie lianhe hui, Shanghai China Union of Women's Association, or Shanghai China UWA). Through the leftist journal 女聲 (Nüsheng, Women's Voice), Shanghai UWA exerted significant impact on the women's suffrage movements in the 1920s.

In The Valiant and The Culprit, the vexed relationship between female heroism and national crisis and women's political consciousness is centrally reflected in the scene in which Tanhua declines Chaoying's proposal by expressing her first ideal of saving the country and fulfilling her individual duties to the nation. For Tanhua, such a personal choice is an important political gesture and expresses her ideal of contributing to China's national reform. She says to Chaoying, "A great misfortune of our people is that we live in such an era of chaos and ten thousand evils. Men or women, we should all summon our individual learning and knowledge, participate in reforming the society, diligently fulfill our natural duties as national citizens. We shall not let the splendid nation of China disintegrate, fall apart and become enslaved by other nations, and finally fall into utterly irredeemable circumstances. This is the proper way of it" (13: 4).

In this dialogue, Tanhua's epochal sentiment elevates love and manifests its moral aspect. In the tumultuous historical era, she says, those who are addicted to emotion "may seem amorous to the ignorant; yet the sagacious ones view them as egocentric" (13: 4). She continues to lament the decline of the country,

I regret that such a great nation is in a periled situation as if holding on by a thin hair.
Anxieties at home and dangers outside have made people's bitterness endless.
The atmosphere in the government is exceedingly degenerated;
the officials sitting in high positions put on grand appearances but only love money.
Those who are educated are not acquainted with worldly ways;
when their talents are not put into use, they lament the uselessness of their learning.
The businessmen are sly, peasants and workers slothful,
the government exhausts the use of natural resources and increases people's taxes.
The warlords are rampant and hold towering powers.
They each rule a region and fight against each other. . . .
The ancient saying goes that there are four borders of our nation, which are all lost today.
I am afraid that in a short instant great calamity will follow.
Every time I compare our nation with Japan, our neighbor in the east,
I feel truly ashamed by their strength and our weakness.
Hence we should, like the ancient Emperor Yue Goujian, sleep on
brushwood and taste gall every day to wash off the previous dishonor.
Ten thousand people, one heart, we shoulder the responsibility together.
At the loss of our benefits and rights, we plan on recovery,
and gradually work toward the prosperity of the nation and the peacefulness of our people.

Today, China is a swallow's nest in a dangerous situation.

In vain we wait for the clarification of the situation; it is really difficult for people to live a long life.

In such a circumstance, one should cease his desire for love and hold onto his power;

a man should not forfeit his duties to his beautiful motherlands.

I myself, though one of the powerless women, will devote myself to the career of highest importance and challenge, and regard death as a mere return to my fate.

Suppose that I fall in love with fame and fortune and change my morale, even if I steal a life in the world I would always have regrets and shame.

(13: 5)

The heroine's voice takes this textual moment, expressing women's strong social awareness and desire to act as a social agents, which is no longer restricted to the usual boundaries of gender, age, and family background. A nascent sense of identity as a national citizen amplifies Tanhua's sense of self and distinguishes her from the preceding tanci heroines, whose transgression of social boundaries is often imaginative and temporary. The author imagines the woman's true emancipation as part of the national course of emancipation and self-empowerment, the individual's agency as part of the nation's journey toward agency and sovereignty. Tanhua appeals to Chaoying for comradeship between men and women that will ultimately contribute to the course of national rejuvenation. Such a new relationship is made possible by displacing her gender role as a wife. Tanhua's rejection of Chaoying has shown a remarkable degree of women's autonomy and agency, for Tanhua, now unyoked by marriage, enjoys the freedom to travel across national boundaries. In Jiang's tanci, a fraternal, nonhierarchical relationship between men and women is evoked to displace love. Benedict Anderson discusses the nation imagined this way as a community based on a deep, horizontal comradeship (57).

In Jiang's text, women's social agency and empowerment is achieved through evocative relationships with one's self, the social community, and the nation. Chinese reformers simultaneously took on the themes of national rejuvenation and female liberation and considered women's liberation in the larger contexts of social and national reform (for male discourse on women in the May Fourth era, see Chan 13-32). Jiang Yingqing's tanci, resounding with these prevalent sociohistorical discourses, takes on the relationship between women and nation as a pivotal position from which to reimagine modern women's gender agency and self-empowerment. Joan Wallach Scott suggests that the definition of gender can be considered with two propositions: "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (42). In Fengliu zuiren, Tanhua is portrayed as a social agent who possesses the knowledge, wisdom, and power to lead women's collective self-empowerment. Tanhua's political enthusiasm and nationalistic passion show that her role is not simply symbolic. Devoting herself to the course of national agency,
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Tanhua has been endowed with individual agency to pursue knowledge and power. When the gravely ill Chaoying meets Tanhua, who now has returned from abroad and has become the head of a hospital in Shanghai, he recalls Tanhua's lofty aspiration that accounts for her current success. He ponders, "In the past she confided to me her thoughts, and deeply regretted / the corruption among the officials and the lack of management in the government. / She said that for women to be impotent is certainly a shame. / For men, if they are uneducated they should feel the shame all the more. / She is indeed not interested in excelling with her peers in feminine arts such as knitting her eyebrows or contriving her smiles. / In the women's world, her aspiration and knowledge should be deemed as the best" (32: 7).

In this passage, the male protagonist's perspective reveals that Tanhua's spirit of leadership among progressive women separates her from the self-centered modern girls represented by Gu Xuefen (古雪芬) and Hong Qingjiao (洪青椒). Tanhua's selflessness in serving society is clearly demonstrated by a female schoolmate's comments about her: "In the Women's World you are really devoted to public affairs, / sacrificing yourself and becoming famous for your work for the benefit of others; / the ill and impoverished local people have bathed in your grace and generosity. / Men can not compare to you in achievement; / despite being a woman you are sophisticated and worldly" (32: 11). Tanhua's devotion to curing the ill and supporting the poor conveys that she is no longer merely restrained by the elite class to which she was born, but finds a new social role by immersing herself with the working-class and the socially disadvantaged. Jiang's text, as the above passage shows, illustrates the moral importance of obtaining modern knowledge and Tanhua's exercise of personal knowledge for empowerment of others.

Jiang's depiction of Tanhua's character could be a form of self-reflection on the social activism of educated women during the New Culture Movement in the 1910s and 1920s, women who play a leadership role as agents of social change among the masses. The New Culture Movement was promoted by Chinese intellectuals who were disillusioned by the 1911 Revolution's failure to establish a strong modern nation-state. Preceding the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the New Culture Movement was launched with the publication of Chen Duxiu's essay, "Appeal to Youth," in 新青年 (Xin qingnian, New Youth) in 1915. In the essay, Chen states that Chinese civilization represents decay and conservatism. China fell behind the West because of the West's dynamism, science, and high ethical principles of democracy and socialism. Chen promotes Western values in the names of 德先生 (De xiansheng, Mr. Democracy) and 賽先生 (Sai xiansheng, Mr. Science) which represent two core values of the New Culture Movement. The movement was considered to be a reaction of a relatively small number of influential intellectuals to circumstances surrounding the presidency of the military lord Yuan Shikai. The May Fourth Movement, which took place a few years later, was a more activist political movement involving younger students and sought to appeal to different social groups (Zarrow 128-45). In this historical context, Tanhua represents a group of intellectuals who hope to rejuvenate Chinese culture by replacing some of China's "traditional" customs with
"modern" Western literature and culture. Her experience of studying in the United States is reflective of certain progressive youth groups of the time who studied and returned to China and devoted themselves to the course of national reform.

The heroine's life trajectory refracts contemporary views of modernization and social progress. Judge states that in the early twentieth century, progressive male intellectuals "encouraged their female compatriots to follow Western women into linear, national, masculine time" (Judge, _Precious Raft_ 14). Women's trajectory of leaving the backward China and studying in the West reflects such a linear model of historical progress. For a woman to travel overseas and devote herself to advocating for women's rights further represents a lofty sociopolitical ideal of the reformers. Particularly, feminism in republican China "was considered part of the universal truth and an indicator of a higher stage of civilization" because its adoption was seen as a "crucial strategy for China to accelerate the speed of evolution in its race against the West" (Wang, Zheng 358). Jiang's _tanci_ demonstrates these progressive traits as well as the irruptions of the traditional into the progressive, showing the uneven temporalities of past and present characteristics of the era. Her career as a female doctor and her choice to save the masses from ailment and pain is reminiscent of Western-trained women doctors, including the famous female doctor Kang Aide (康愛德, 1873-1931), whom the late Qing reformist Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929) highly praised (Liang, Qichao, "Ji Jiangxi kangnüshi"). An ensuing example is Yang Buwei (楊步偉, 1889-1981), the wife of the famous modern Chinese linguist Zhao Yuanren (趙元任, 1892-1982). Yang was the first modern Chinese woman who received a doctoral degree in medicine in the United States and had been a school principal and physician running her own clinic after studying in Japan before marrying Zhao (see Yang, Buwei).

In comparison with Tanhua, who develops a successful career after returning from overseas, Chaoying suffers the frustration of his personal ideals and gives in to his parents' marriage arrangement, since his ravenous wife and her dominant family determine whether or not he can secure a job in Shanghai. These characters' lives in cosmopolitan Shanghai reveal the modern individuals' frustrations, relapses, and feelings of alienation. The gender dynamics between the two main characters is palpably portrayed in Tanhua's two rejections of Chaoying's marriage proposals. When Chaoying first proposes marriage to Tanhua, she declines by stating her personal aspiration to further the cause of women's rights. She proclaims,

Today women's rights are developing at the initial stage; faithfulness and generosity are the same principles everywhere in the globe. I heard that you have been formally engaged to the daughter of the Hong family in Moli; how could you, then, change your love and desert her? An ordinary woman like me has little education and could not be a good match for you. Let us then go our own ways and never force each other to change. It may show a high level of affection if you remain my teacher and friend. Keeping this pure intention all my life, I take an oath to stay single to return your affection for me. (13: 3)
The protofeminist initiative does not stand in contradiction to the conventions of chastity and loyalty, but endorses the rights of both modern and traditional women. Employing traditional moral principles and vowing to keep her virginity, Tanhua acquires both moral agency and the freedom to pursue knowledge and independence. The author mediates feminist initiative with traditional notions of chastity and faithfulness, arguing that, for Chaoying, to marry his fiancée will bring a familial happiness and please his mother, a way of fulfilling his duties as a son and a faithful husband. She herself would rather be a virgin for the rest of her life to return his favor toward her. When the amorous Chaoying vows to live a single life like Tanhua to keep their friendship, Tanhua, concerned about his lingering affections for her, uses the traditional notion of filial piety to persuade Chaoying to marry his fiancée Qingjiao to fulfill his parents' expectation of having a grandchild (13: 6).

The modern educated heroine, as this example suggests, displays much empathy toward traditional women. Putting herself in the place of Chaoying's fiancée, she ponders the risky situation into which she might put the fiancée, and she is aware that her personal freedom may endanger Chaoying's family solidarity. Had she given Chaoying her hand, "Using force to deprive her of the marriage would be truly base. / The two families will suffer from ocean-wide and irresolveable grievance. / If I could persuade Chaoying into changing his thoughts, / which will make the Zhen family full of happiness" (13: 8). Tanhua's character discloses a blending of traditional feminine virtues of chastity and filial piety with feminist thought.

Jiang Yingqing's *tanci* passes along feminist potential through traditional moral principles of loyalty and empathy, showing that both the modern Chinese female citizen and China as a nation are products of mutual transformations of the local and the translocal. As a textbook author explains, the historical Chinese women served as "the past leaders of the new Chinese female citizen," while the "modern" Western heroines were a reflection of her "future image" (Judge, "Blended Wish Images" 105). Jiang Yingqing's presentation of the modern woman illustrates the tradition/modern binary, that is, "proponents of different agendas for the present and programs for the future found authority in different historical locations often in ways that defied ideological logic" (Judge, "Blended Wish Images" 132). Jiang's *tanci*, one may say, facilitates a re-imagination of femininity through epochal encounters between the historical and the present, between revolutionary love and customary responsibilities. Tanhua's refusal of Chaoying's first proposal might also be caused by her reluctance to be involved in a lawsuit over her romance with Chaoying, which could cause her to lose her innocent name (13: 9). At this period there were more divorce lawsuits in Shanghai, and in such cases the woman who was divorced was generally in a morally disadvantageous position. A *tanci* song by Jiang, "愛河波" ("Aihe bo," "Torrents in the River of Love") talks about a case in which a divorced woman regrets her choice (Tanci kaipian ji 48). Similar portrayals of divorced women's regrets can also be found in a silent film *情海重吻* (Qinghai chongwen, Oceans of Passion, Re-Kissing; 1928), in which a woman, after divorcing her husband, regrets her choice and remarries her ex-husband.
At the end of the story, when Chaoying finds out that he cannot live a harmonious life with Hong Qingjiao and divorces her, he meets Tanhua again after she has returned from abroad and is working as a principal of a local hospital in Shanghai. When Chaoying, his affection revived for Tanhua, proposes to her again, Tanhua chooses to decline by writing him a letter, stating her choice of a professional woman's life over marriage. She suggests his failed proposal is a sign that they shall not be married by fate. The letter describes an interface between past and present, between the way it could have been and the impossibility of a complicit reunion between them. Tanhua understands that Chaoying's proposal was made in the name of love, but it actually pushes her into fleeing this grimy and muddled world as soon as possible (32: 32). The text portrays the heroine's alienated and short-lived existence in a degenerated social circumstance, although she is morally intact and uncontaminated by the corrupted ways of modern life. She can not continue to work at the hospital, and finally leaves Shanghai for a life abroad. In the letter, she uses an archaic prosaic style to elevate her and Chaoying's emotions to a more universal level.

When I recall those times when you could seize the chance and take action, heaven did not allow the unfitted union between us. This must make our intimate relationship become estranged, who have been close but separate from each other. Until now, when time and tide change, you say that we must be predestined on the "Stone of Three Lives"; I do not think that this is doable. Those who are blind to the current times are not wise, those who countervail heavenly ways are not blessed. As a gentleman, why should you make such a choice of the unwise and the unblessed? Alas, I am not the legendary beauty Bao Si whose charm falls a city, but you do have an avaricious heart as Han Emperor Guangwu who covets the land of the Shu after capturing the land of the Long. Beware that one's beauty and talent both are tender flowers which may wither overnight. The romance between the talented scholar Han Zhong and the beautiful maid Ziyu, for example, ends with Ziyu's death of illness and dissipation of her spirit upon Han Zhong's return from a journey overseas. Looking into each other's face, we can not anticipate the day of reunion. Please do not be heart-broken and fall ill again. (32: 36)

The text is embedded with a proverb, "delong wangshu" (Coveting Shu After Conquering Long), alluding to Emperor Liu Xiu of the East Han (CE 25-220). During a conquest in AD 32, the emperor was said to give orders to his general upon conquest of the land of Long, "Now that we have conquered Long, go and acquire the land of Shu." The expression illustrates "having insatiable desires" (Fan 47: 17). The passage alludes to the legendary romance between Ziyu and Han Zhong. Ziyu is the daughter of the Wu emperor Fuchai who falls in love with a servant, Han Zhong. The emperor is enraged with their love affair and forbids her marriage with Han. The disheartened Ziyu dies of lovesickness. Years later, when Han Zhong returns from traveling overseas, Ziyu's spirit reappears and gives Han a pearl as gift. She passes along her greetings to the emperor by entering his dream. The empress hears about Ziyu's return and hurries out to embrace her, only to find her daughter's body evaporates like light smoke into the air. The allusion thus refers to young women who pass
away at any early age (Gan 554-58). This letter displays a prominent degree of narrative agency ascribed to the female character by the author, telling the story from Tanhua's point of view. Through this letter Tanhua expresses her desire for freedom and social mobility, which will be impossible if she agrees to marry him. In contrast, Chaoying's inability to take effective action and break away from the yokes of his family is the ultimate reason for their separation. His proposal goes against the tides of life and the world.

The reference to 三生石 (sanshengshi, Stone of Three Lives) evokes archaic feelings of friendship and destiny, rather than love and desire. The "Stone of Three Lives" alludes to the Tang dynasty monk Yuanguan (圓觀). While taking a walk near Yangzi River with his friend Li Yuan, they see a pregnant woman who is carrying water from the river along with other women. Yuanguan weeps at the sight and tells Li that he will pass away soon and be reborn as the son of this pregnant woman, and that twelve years later, he will become a shepherd, and reunite with Li in the Tianzhu Temple in Hangzhou. That night, Yuanguan passes away. Three days later, Li visits the pregnant woman and sees that the baby is born as predicted; the baby smiles at Li as if recognizing his face. Twelve years later, Li visits the temple in Hangzhou and meets with the reincarnated Yuanguan as foretold. To commemorate Yuanguan, who predicts his three lives after death, people name a stone near the Tianzhu Temple as the Stone of Three Lives. Legend has it that Li Yuan and Yuanguan meet each other near this stone (Yuan Jiao 831). The text unveils Tanhua's determination to defy the circle of destiny and to imagine a new life in a new era and a new worldly order. The ensuing lines are stylistically akin to poetic responses between traditional courtesan poets and their literati friends, indicating that she does not desire love from him. The passage emphasizes the ironic distance between the two, indicating that the parted paths of the two make the reunion unattainable. The language, form, and content of the letter insinuate Tanhua's propriety and determination, articulating adroitly her determination to pursue autonomy through the fictional personae of a traditional talented woman.

Tanhua's final journey abroad implies she may live an independent life outside familial and social boundaries, a vanguard life outside marriage. In comparison to traditional women characters in earlier tanci, who resort to cross-dressing and even death to flee from imposed marriage arrangements, Tanhua's decision is open and public. In the context of early twentieth-century women's social activism, Tanhua's choice also reflects a form of self-sacrifice for the course of women's emancipation. A 1919 essay asserts that "to be in the vanguard of women's emancipation requires self-sacrifice." The author appeals for recruiting the vanguard comrades and those who are determined to remain single (Zhang Ruoming 197-206). To live a single life, for Zhang, opens up a space for women's individual and social agency.

Such forms of social understanding and advocacy, though provoking and controversial, were manifested widely in numerous debates about women's right to stay single and is strongly endorsed by the author in Jiang's tanci. The narrator applauds Tanhua's choice of a single life. "Her single life breaks the diurnal dream of love; / her unrivalled beauty refuses to be tainted. / Even when the rocks collapse and
the sea dries up, / her admirable story will be passed along in people's words / and shall reverberate on the strings of *pipa* for a thousand years" (32: 37). As this ending shows, women's celibacy in Jiang's *tanci* is presented as a suitable alternative to marriage and vows of love. Hence, Tanhua berates those who force upon her a life not based on her profession and social aspirations.

The question of modern women's celibacy was extensively discussed in newspapers and media in 1920s Shanghai. Modern critics carried out a series of journalistic debates on women's celibacy and its relation to modern society, the traditional family system, and civilization. Jiang's contemporary, social critic Zhou Jianren (周建人), reviewed three kinds of social discourses about women's celibacy (Zhou Jianren 7-15). The first school is 善種學者 (*Shanzhong xuezhe*, the Eugenics School), which upholds women's inborn responsibility to give birth and cultivate excellent descendants. The second is 禁欲主義 (*Jinyu zhuyi*, the Asceticism School), which respects women's virginity and regards sexual desire as impure and undesirable. The third category is 自發的獨身 (*zifa de dushen*, self-chosen celibacy), in which the woman makes a self-conscious choice to be single, due to lack of time, strong devotion to study or work, lack of an ideal match, or failure in a former relationship. Zhou empathizes with women's disadvantaged social and economic status and argues that, because women have always been regarded as a form of commodity, a woman's value must be attached to a husband and manifested through her marriage. Consequently, a woman rarely has the opportunity to choose a single life. Zhou agrees that women of the elite social class, who have received education and can live outside marriage, display both the progression of the society and resistance to the old constrictive family system ("Zhongguo nüzi" 7-15). Another critic, Kong Xiangwo (孔襄我), held that absolute celibacy, in the case of those who resist marriage from the beginning, reduces the pleasure of life, causes a lack of moral restrictions on sexual behaviors, and ultimately results in the regression of the society (Kong 10-11).

Many critics were strongly supportive of women living a single life. In 1922, Youtong (友彤) translated an essay by a Japanese scholar who discussed why the famous Swedish educator and activist Madame Ellen Key advocated celibacy through her own personal example (Youtong 12-15). The Japanese scholar proposes that Ellen Key possibly did not marry due to her religious devotion to Christianity. Rather, she finally becomes not just a mother to a few children, but "the mother of the tens and thousands of people in the world" (Youtong 15). The author suggests that women who live by their will and their beliefs like Ellen Key should all live with passion as she did. Wei Ruzhi (魏如芝) alludes to the ancient story of the "Infant of Northern Palace" who would decline marriage and devote her whole life to taking care of her parents. Wei, in his discussion of women's celibacy and its relation with family and society, by including real examples from women and their friends, provides a powerful argument that living a single life is largely beneficial to the welfare of society and the nation, and hence should be endorsed and strongly encouraged (Wei Ruzhi 25-28). These debates on women's celibacy during Jiang's time provide a historically situated perspective for the current discussion of the celibate heroine
in Jiang's *tanci*. Tanhua's rejection of marriage is imbued with nascent meanings in the historical context of women's awakening and is increasingly supported by public activism in the 1920s. A real historical example of single women in Jiang's time is Lü Bicheng (呂碧城, 1883-1943). Lü was a poet, the first female journalist in China, and the principal of Beiyang Women's Public School. Her achievement in literature, business, and political activism was so outstanding that her husband-to-be broke his engagement with her because her excellence had exceeded the rank of her fiancé's family. Having lived a single woman's life, Lü traveled to Europe. During World War I, she returned to China and took to Buddhism for spiritual self-comfort. Lü's life reveals that an intellectually accomplished woman in the republican period still suffered extensive constraints from social reality (Fong, Qian, and Zurndorfer, *Beyond Traditions* 12-60). Even the male protagonist Chaoying, after being turned down by Tanhua, admires her political aspiration and thinks of emulating her deeds.

Tanhua's role as a single and professional woman also provokes further study of journalistic debates about Chinese women's return home in the 1930s. In 1934, Liu Meijun published an essay in the leftist journal *Nüsheng* (Women's Voice), in which she counters the position that women should return home to increase the percentage of sound marriages and the healthy birth of a new population, and that professional women should be completely rescinded so that men who are out of work can be given better employment opportunities (Liu Meijun 6). Liu criticizes such opinions as objectifying women and limiting their social value to their ability of giving birth at a time of war and national turmoil. Similar debates have appeared in other journals such as 玲瓊 (*Linglong*, 1936) and 新世界 (*Xinshijie*, Today's World, 1937), and 女青年 (*Nü qingnian*, Female Youth 1937), offering multivalent perspectives on professional women's personal choices between marriage and work, and how such choices were influenced by the national discourses on reform and modernization.

Tanhua's choice of devotion to social activism over marriage displays women's self-conscious exploration of new societal roles in a historical era of social and political activism. Although Tanhua has chosen to live a single life, she has devoted her knowledge and wisdom to the education of fellow women schoolmates and the benefit of disempowered women of lower social classes. A persuasive example in the text demonstrates how Tanhua helps her classmate Lin Daoyu (林道腴) solve a family dispute. Lin Daoyu's sister, Lin Daoxuan (林道瑄), is seduced by a libertine Gu Tan due to the corrupting influence of a female friend, Zhang Ouling (張藕玲), in the women's school. Daoyu and Daoxuan's father, ashamed by Daoxuan's deeds, suddenly leaves home. Their disheartened mother then attempts to commit suicide due to this family scandal. The desperate Daoyu hopes that Tanhua, her educated classmate, can mediate between her parents. The text offers a critical reflection of women's schools and suggests that, because the administrative system of such schools is not complete and mature, some women who merely attend the school to pursue fashion are not really well educated and can impose a negative influence on other female students. Through this example, the author offers a scathing criticism of those who have acted wrongly in the name of advocating 新女界 (*xin nüjie*, new
woman's world) (14: 12). Upon Daoyu's request, the benevolent Tanhua immediately visits Shanghai, helping Daoyu to comfort her aged parents and restore their confidence in Daoxuan's innocent nature, acting as a teacher, mentor, and adviser for other women. This chapter illustrates the amplification of Tanhua's character through the intimate conversation between Tanhua and Daoxuan. Tanhua's noble nature is set in sharp contrast with Daoxuan's misfortune and carelessness. Daoxuan's mother comments that the individual's moral achievement is dependent on her individual choice, and does not have a direct relationship with attending the women's school, a comment reminiscent of contemporary controversies about the negative influence of women's schools on social morality (15: 6). Chen Weike suggests that in late imperial Beijing, women used the girls' schools as stepping stones for "going public." When the education of women increasingly became a public concern in the early twentieth century, there were widespread debates about the value, means, and methods adopted in these women's schools (Chen Weike 107-44).

Tanhua's intelligence and feminine consciousness are also reflected in a scene in which she reads the Qing novel The Dream of the Red Chamber with Daoyu. Reading an early chapter in which the protagonist Jia Baoyu takes an oath to become a monk, Tanhua ponders that if no one had hindered Baoyu and he had been allowed to leave the secular world, the heroine Daiyu may not have had to suffer death from loss of love at the end of the story. Tanhua's interpretation of the novel creates a feminine perspective on reading traditional literature and exposes her consciousness of looking for an alternative outcome for the ill-fated heroine Daiyu, whose death is also a tragedy caused by her powerless social circumstances, which may be changed in a modern epoch.

Tanhua's endorsement of new women's social commitment is evidenced by her frequent contact with progressive male intellectuals. She openly meets male intellectuals at her house, showing a degree of openness for women's social activities. In one of their early meetings, Tanhua and Chaoying have a conversation about 新文学 (xin wenxue, New Literature). Chaoying, fluent in offering replies and criticism, impresses Tanhua with his knowledge and wisdom. Their mutual friend asks them to maintain communication to talk about questions related to literature and arts. The textual depiction of Chaoying, Tanhua, and their friends indicate that they are open-minded intellectuals who possibly have been influenced by the May Fourth Movement and the vernacular literature which had replaced the traditional 文言 (wenyan, classical Chinese text) since 1920 and led to a profound reform in literature and art. Chen Duxiu, a leading figure advocating New Literature, suggests that literature plays an instrumental role in transmitting ideas (Chen Duxiu, "Wenxue geming lun"). Likewise Hu Shi states that vernacular literature can be used as "a vehicle for new ideas and new mentalities" (Hu Shi 174; Cai).

In comparison with the hero's journey back from abroad, a return to the traditional and the local, Tanhua's itinerary from Hangzhou to the West represents a future-oriented journey toward the outside world in search of a society beyond the traditional and the local. While Tanhua represents the few educated women who could support themselves with work, many other women of lesser education or family
wealth could not or would not follow the heroine’s path toward living an independent life. While the text illustrates Tanhua’s social and political ideals, it also implies clearly that in such a historical context, a modern woman's social roles and freedoms are inevitably contingent on her economic status. Tanhua’s resistance to being objectified distinguishes her from many others and reflects her conscious search for an autonomous life beyond marriage. Jiang’s tanci also portrays an antiheroine. Hong Qingjiao, Chaoying's wife, is a modern girl in Shanghai whose character reflects the commoditization of modern women and their lack of self-consciousness. As the antiheroine, Qingjiao is described with a moralistic tone of voice by the narrator, representing the negative, alienating effect of modernization on women.

Tanhua’s character as a modern woman committed to social activism evokes questions about the socioeconomic conditions that underpin women’s choices concerning love, marriage, and work in the republican era. In his essay, "What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?" Lu Xun, commenting on Ibsen’s famous play, argues that the core question for women who seek to live outside marriage is economic rights, which are central to their true social freedom. "There must be a fair sharing out between men and women in the family; second, men and women must have equal rights in society" (Lu 151). A discussion of women’s economic status and the marriage system can be found in a 1930 article "New and Old Merchandise vs. New and Old Women," in which the author proposes that women who have been liberated from the dangers of abduction, seduction, and male manipulation must devote themselves to the reform of the commercial society for true self-liberation (Tao Xisheng 2-5). In Jiang’s text, Chaoying’s wife Qingjiao is such an example. In contrast with Tanhua’s other-oriented character, Hong Qingjiao is a conceited, material-driven modern girl in Shanghai. Mrs. Hong’s daughter is an illicit child whose father is the son of a fallen Qing official, a unique component of the dominant social class, many of whom were bankers and stockbrokers who dominated social economy. To the Hong family, Chaoying was erudite, handsome, and also genteel, a perfect match for their Qingjiao. Hong Qingjiao’s character, reminiscent of the archetype of the modern girl, portrays a kind of modern woman who enjoys the comfort of modern life but cannot truly do away with old-fashioned habits. Before marriage, Qingjiao likes to go to the dancing halls, wear heavy make-up, and flirt with men of rich families. In the evening, she finds excuses to go out and lies to her parents, saying that she needs to take English classes. She loves the city life so much that she rejects the expectation to live with Chaoying’s parents in Hangzhou (8: 6).

The difference between Hangzhou and Shanghai is one between a traditional city of pastoral beauty and a metropolis of modern expediency and glamour. This contrast also lays the ground for the social difference between the affluent Hong family and the traditional, middle-class family of Chaoying. Chaoying’s father-in-law is concerned only with earning money and working at the trade union. The narrator describes the self-content of a bourgeois family that enjoys the conveniences of obtaining food and clothing in the urban city. Not only does Qingjiao demonstrate a condescending attitude to Chaoying, who comes from Hangzhou, but the pragmatic
Mrs. Hong also looks down on Chaoying's bookishness. Economically dependent on Qingjiao's family in Shanghai, Chaoying becomes conciliatory to his wife, since her family provides the house and the opportunity of a job in a bank in Shanghai.

The inevitable collision of the two different families takes place immediately when Chaoying and his mother arrive in Shanghai to meet Qingjiao at the railway station. Qingjiao is embarrassed by a fashionable young male playmate of hers, who, not knowing that she is now married, comes by and greets her in a teasing manner in front of her old-fashioned, foot-bound mother-in-law. Chaoying's mother is greatly offended by the sight of the flirtation and suspects that the matchmaker has lied to them, and that the daughter-in-law is not virtuous and has received little education. Afraid that her mother-in-law might accuse her of inappropriate manners and a lack of traditional virtue, Qingjiao takes a chance and plays the victim's role in front of Chaoying. She complains to Chaoying about his mother's suspicion, insisting on her own innocence. This unsettling event leads to the onset of a series of conflicts between Qingjiao and her mother-in-law, who eventually leaves Shanghai and returns to Hangzhou.

Chaoying's mother regrets forcing Chaoying into this marriage with Hong Qingjiao, who enjoys spending money and seeking entertainment outside everyday marriage (23: 10). The city of Shanghai, where urban materialism prevails, is portrayed as 銷金窟 (xiaojinku, a gold-melting cave), which contains endless temptations for a shallow and fun-loving young woman like Qingjiao (see Yeh). After the couple moves from Hangzhou to Shanghai, the dispute between them escalates. Qingjiao's subversive attitude is revealed in a monologue in which she defends her love for material comfort. "Since ancient times the beauties have been cared for in golden chambers; / who would care to appreciate the songs of the poor and lowly born? / You should not blame me for having little affection for a husband of meager fortune, / for since the ancient times, those women who were commemorated with memorial portals have only enjoyed their fame of chastity in vain." She ponders on her young lover, the son of a rich merchant, and prefers his effeminate looks and cleverness in pleasing women. Nonchalant with the bookish husband who refuses to go out and enjoy the urban night life, Qingjiao can only imagine the hustle and bustle of the modern theater, where "men and women are mingled and seated side by side; the waft of cologne and fragrance is ample to stir one's spirit" (26: 6). In the entertainment halls, "the crowd is wide as a sea, shoulder by shoulder, the couples are countless in number. Since men and women can socialize in public and have little restraint, they talk and laugh in high spirits." This conjured mental linkage between Qingjiao with the urban sites of entertainment, such as halls and theaters, reveals her aspirations for the urban space, which is a site of pleasure and freedom in comparison with her constraining household. In a tanci song, 遊夜花園 ("You yehuayuan," "A Tour of the Night Garden"), Jiang strongly disapproves of the morally corrupting forces of decadent modern entertainment sites and discourages youth from becoming addicted to such imprudent pleasure (Tanci kaipian ji 14-15).

Qingjiao's boredom and melancholy are symptomatic of the individual trapped in an increasingly congested modern society. Emblematic of the modern girl
in cosmopolitan Shanghai, she is the self-centered petit bourgeois who brings about her own downfall by having an illicit love affair. Qingjiao is one of the petty urbanites of Shanghai, who were in flux throughout the period covered in Jiang's tanci. She is a fallen imperial official's illicit daughter, a fashion girl whose education does nothing but keep her fashionable, a shrewd wife who lingers in dancing halls and does not return home.

Qingjiao's character as the antiheroine is illustrated in the title picture in chapter 24; she is portrayed as a woman leaving the house, while the husband looks on, not daring to complain. Knowing that her husband is sick and already suspecting her unfaithfulness, she still stays overnight with her lover. Her actions cause Chaoying's health to further deteriorate and almost cost him his life. Chaoying has nothing to do but play ngaa pai, listen to the radio, or read the newspaper, which consists of nothing other than accounts of people running into debt during a time of chaos and disorder and miscellaneous reports of rape and abduction (24: 9). Chaoying sacrifices his desire to live in Hangzhou and moves to Shanghai for a profession, his life and work completely dependent on his wife's family connections. His personal tragedy is echoed by a group of his friends who are elite intellectuals educated abroad but who find it hard to adapt to the social reality at home. Even if his father-in-law's connection provides a good possibility for Chaoying to practice his knowledge, he finds it difficult to apply that knowledge to anything. The name of the hero, Zhen Chaoying, indicates a "truly exceptional intellect." The name is ironic, however, as the story later reveals that he cannot make his own decisions in marriage and career due to family constraints and a conventional mentality. The differences and conflicts between the Western-educated Chaoying and Qingjiao, a descendant of the local elite, portray a time when modern intellectuals are disempowered by local warlords, corrupted imperial officials, opportunist bankers, and entrepreneurs who collaborate and dictate the development of China's socio-economy.

In contrast to Chaoying's frustration with his cosmopolitan ideals in the local reality, Qingjiao's character represents the shrewd, resourceful, and calculating aspects of the petite bourgeoisie woman. When she and her lover Zhou Shaowen are found out at a Shanghai hotel and blackmailed by a gang of hooligans, she reacts with unusual calmness and composure. When her lover is horrified by the exposure and does not know how to respond to the situation, Qingjiao adroitly bargains with the blackmailing villains, settles upon the price the lover should pay to keep their affair secret, and finds her way out of the hotel without paying a penny herself. The text depicts a woman who is in full command of the situation and who plays diverse roles. To her female lawyer friend, she impersonates the victimized wife dominated by a tasteless and uncaring husband; to her parents she is the obedient and understanding daughter; to Chaoying, she pretends to be the attractive companion who, although spoiled and headstrong, still unveils some true feelings for him when he is fatally ill.

In her tanci, Jiang's exploration of Chaoying's domestic life portrays the characters in an interior landscape of the city, where profound changes have been brought upon traditional family relationships through the process of urbanization.
This controversy between the modern and the traditional is remarkably reflected in the afflicted relationship between Qingjiao and her mother-in-law, a woman bound by old traditions. When the mother blames the daughter-in-law for not taking good care of Chaoying, Qingjiao retorts, "[My mother,] your reproach is really far-fetched. Even though we are a couple resting in the same bed, how on earth could I know his mindset?" (34: 2). Traditional values of fidelity, filial devotion, and chastity have been completely dismantled. This scenario also recalls contemporary social controversies about modern women who neglect traditional family values and are seduced by the sounds and sights of urban life. An article in 1924, for example, portrays a group of modern girls as 紅粉骷髏 (hongfen kulou, rouged skeletons) who, fully dressed in silk gowns, flowery hats, shining diamonds, and precious stones, spend their days strolling in the hustling markets and theaters or playing majiang day and night. The author laments, "In such fragrant and intoxicating dreams, they do not know what human being is, and what personality means. Half drunk in the cradle of material desires, they squander time and waste money" (Pu Nong 7). Qingjiao is a woman who, uneducated and lacking self-consciousness, easily falls into the traps and temptations of urban society. The author's attitude is profoundly critical and disapproving of this character, and by extension, of the social trend of fully embracing modern civilization and abandoning traditional familial virtues.

Qingjiao's character may represent the Modern Girl archetype who is a "mirror-gazing woman seeking to find herself" (Qian Qianwu 226-36). Portrayed as a femme fatale character, she evokes the image of a praying mantis devouring a befuddled urban man. The Confucian framework is also largely reflected in the book. Even though the author advocates for women exploring social roles, she is critical of the corrupting force of modern civilization. Qingjiao is symbolic of the many "fallen women" in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai who enjoyed the pleasures and conveniences of modern life and who were seduced by playboys and suffered failed marriages. Qingjiao's relationship with her lover leads to the incident of blackmail that, in turn, brings her husband to bankruptcy; however, Qingjiao herself emerges unscathed. Her defiance against Chaoying causes the resurgence of his illness that almost takes his life. Qingjiao represents the dangerously desirable femme fatale, whereas Tanhua represents an introspective female subject searching for her identity. Such descriptions of transgressive women are reminiscent of what David Der-wei Wang notes as signs of emotive excess in late Qing fiction, which not only "include transgression or mismatching of different categories of emotions but also the trivialization or exaggeration of subjects and forms all out of proportion" (Wang, David Der-wei 38-41).

The text, in addition to the vivid depiction of the progressive Tanhua and the modern girl Qingjiao, portrays many minor women characters. In comparison with Tanhua's image, which is endowed with narrative centrality and power, these minor female characters contribute to the collective representation of womanhood and jointly reflect the polemical question of femininity, its multiple manifestations in ordinary women's daily lives, and the dialectical relation between individual agency and social contingency. The life stories of these ordinary women refract the ideals
of modern womanhood and unravel the gaps between imagined freedom and unsurpassable constraints, between progressive visions and regressive social customs. Like Qingjiao, Gu Tan's sister Xuefen is a calculating and dominant character. In the house she commands her brother; she is shrewd and responsible for the conspiracy with her brother to seduce Tanhua. However, her cleverness never goes beyond scheming and plotting in ordinary affairs. Although she went to women's school, her personal ambition is never comparable to Tanhua's ideal. Xuefen's scheme with Gu Tan is driven mostly by a desire for Tanhua's money, unveiling the callousness in her nature. A new-fashioned girl, Xuefen smokes cigarettes, plays piano, reads the evening news, and passes her leisure time playing *majiang*. However, she is incapable of sympathizing with women at the grassroots level. When an elderly maid at their house falls down the stairs and is wounded, Xuefen, who dislikes the aged maid, fires her for her clumsiness even though the maid has faithfully served their family for decades. Xuefen also schemes to replace the old servant with a girl who has served at Tanhua's family home in a plot to seduce Tanhua into becoming her brother's wife. Xuefen, though having enjoyed the benefits of good family upbringing and the comforts of modern life, represents a character equally as apathetic and selfish as Qingjiao.

The matchmaker Wang Sansao, who assists Gu Tan in the seduction of Tanhua, is another striking minor character. In order to become close to Tanhua, she pretends to be interested in learning to read and write characters. Tanhua, unsuspicous of Wang's intentions, happily agrees to become her teacher. The matchmaker's character recalls a series of notorious figures in late imperial fiction who exercise morally corrupting influences on women in the inner chambers. Descriptions of morally corrupting matchmakers in late imperial fiction can be found in *The Golden Lotus*, *The Water Margin*, and *Illustrious Words to Instruct the World*. Wang's daughter A Nan (阿囡) is also a lively person. A young, clever girl, A Nan first catches Gu Tan's attention with her artfulness in hair styling. Clever and worldly, she helps her mother welcome Gu Tan. However, seeing that her mother is occupied with matchmaking for others, she laments the meager circumstances that she is in: "It is no good to be born in a low family, / no matter how busy one is, his efforts are all for others' good" (3: 9). Living on her mother's flower-selling business, A Nan can barely make afford daily expenses. Silk garments are not attainable for a nameless girl like her; the coarse and cheap clothing she must wear makes her lose face. Thinking of her marriage, not knowing where and to whom she will be wed, is a nearly unbearable grievance for her. A Nan's monologue makes clear the author's sympathetic feelings toward women born in lower social classes. Like many uneducated women who do not even have formal written names, A Nan thinks only of finding the ideal marriage as her destiny, demonstrating her ultimate value. Minor women characters such as Wang Sansao and A Nan portray women at the bottom of the social classes, bereft of the possibilities of receiving education or of becoming self-sufficient with work.

A similar example of an ill-fated female character is a young woman at women's school who is attracted by the frivolous Gu Tan and is pregnant with his child.
before marrying him. After Gu Tan dies of syphilis due to his degenerative lifestyle, she is overwhelmed with grief and dies, together with the unborn baby, in Tanhua's hospital. Gu Tan's character represents intractable backward social customs and sets off the protagonist Tanhua, who bespeaks the ideals of new womanhood which are constantly being challenged by the old societal and cultural order. While modern education advocates women's freedom, financial independence, and conscious thinking, to Gu Tan, such changes only make women more attractive sexual objects to satisfy male fantasies.

This historical discrepancy between the traditional and the modern contributes to prominent gaps of agency, that is, the gaps between women's ideal of exercising their rights and utilizing their options, and the actual national policy framework and social circumstances that frame and condition the individuals' households and everyday lives. Tanhua's choice to leave the hospital and travel abroad reflects the difficulty for professional women in finding a feasible social space for survival. Social debates about professional women from 1922 to 1926, when Jiang composed this tanci, were part of the process of breaking down the old culture and establishing the new culture. Women's work, importantly, is conditioned by class: those of poor families have to work with their hands at home or work in the fields to support family. Because of their lower social economic status at home and in society, they really do not have any freedom (Keshi 25). Similar concerns are prevalent in translated essays on women and career introduced from the West (see the essay by German critic Madame Hannah in Han Na 543-49). In 1921, activists also introduced to China the history of the International Women's Labor Union and its relations with Chinese women (Se Lu, "Guoji funü" 1-5). The socially and economically oppressed women, as another critic of the time held, are opposite to the capitalists who control the economic power of the society. The author criticizes the limitations of China's feminist scholars, who belong to the third class, drawing examples from the Geneva International Labor Conference in 1922 and the insufficient representation of lower-class women by the China group on that conference.

Social debates about women's working conditions in the 1920s provide evidence that the majority of women did not have access to professional positions due to limited education, family restraints, and lack of opportunities. This retrospection of feminist cultural history in 1920s China resonates with Joan W. Scott's argument that feminist history ideally aspires not only to uncover women in history, but to argue for the primacy of gender in the symbolic formations of culture and the political arrangements shaping social life (1053-75). A reading of Tanhua, Qingjiao, and minor women characters in Fengliu zuiren representing specific forms of femininity invites a redefinition of republican women's roles as important social agents. Women's agency could be "imagined as continuous with unreflective forms of power that are simply transmitted by culturally embedded subjects" (Anderson, Amanda 44). In the text, the multiple images of women, progressive and conservative, elite and uneducated, traditional or modern, are what Amanda Anderson calls the "culturally embedded subjects" in the influx of modern Chinese history. This pluralistic view of
multiple and coexistent forms of femininity and the broad array of women as agents of social change challenge the use of antithetical and polarized terms in defining women's gender roles. The elite heroine Tanhua and the author Jiang Yingqing both act as agents of power who mediate for and speak through themselves of China's social transformation toward modernity. Correspondingly, these fictional stories transformed a traditional genre in order to make a discussion of women's social roles enter into the discourse of the day and become an object for thought.

Jiang's reconfiguration of the *tanci* genre brings to the fore the vexed relationship between the historical legacy of women's self-empowerment and contemporary discourses of women's liberation, social freedom, and gender equality, and elicits new understandings of womanhood and gendered ambiguity during this historical period. During the New Culture Movement, a main controversy was the relation between traditional or classical fiction and modern fiction. The former more often conveys moral messages inserted in poetic forms within the text, while the latter endeavors to convey emancipatory messages. Jiang's use of the *tanci* explores a problematization of the ostensibly different trends of the old and new. Readers may find the long-lasting tradition of didacticism in late imperial *tanci* fiction in the title of Jiang's work *The Valiant* and *The Culprit* which may refer to the contradictory characters, courageous Jia Tanhua and degenerated Gu Tan and Hong Qingjiao. The chapter titles foreshadow moral messages, endorsing the upright and denouncing the corrupted. The story, nonetheless, ends with Tanhua looking for a life of freedom abroad, suggesting modern women's endeavor to search for achievements in a wider social terrain outside marriage. The author conceives female mobility as a form of intellectual sovereignty beyond social and moral constraints. Besides revealing Jiang's legacy of traditional literature, the text's use of didactic titles may also reflect her concern about moral censorship or her conscious choice to meet editorial demands. This stylistic multiplicity once again directs the audience's gaze toward Jiang's re-adaptation of *tanci* to tell new stories of the modern era.

Jiang's use of the traditional narrative form *tanci* as a vessel to mediate and reconfigure nascent ideals of feminine political and social identity is not a unique case. An important precursory example is the *tanci* author Li Guiyu, who composed the voluminous *tanci* *Liuhuameng* (Dream of the Pomegranate Flower). Li's *tanci* extensively portrayed the theme of war, which, mediated through the allegory of bloodshedding, is evoked as a metaphor to convey the author's understanding of the emotional impact of love (Hu, Siao-chen, "War, Violence"). Another prominent female *tanci* author is the Shanghai-based Peng Liangjuan 彭靚娟 (nineteenth century), who authored *Siyunting* (The Pavilion of the Four Clouds; preface dated 1899). Peng's *tanci*, though also containing conventional narrative elements such as cross-dressing, polygamy, and talented and virtuous heroines, portrays multiple subplots of war, violence, tyranny, and exile, mirroring the imminent political crisis of late Qing society (Hu, Siao-chen, *Xin lixiang*).

Following these earlier trends, at the turn of the twentieth century, some progressive male authors also took to writing short *tanci* tales to depict Western heroines
to enlighten their native female audience. Among the most memorable characters in these *tanci* stories are the Russian anarchist Sophia Perofskaya and the French revolutionary Madame Roland, both of whom were not only held up as exemplary feminine models in the late Qing press, but who were even featured as characters in short *tanci* stories. Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was also emulated for her pioneering work in the nursing profession. Western women in these stories oftentimes appeared as super-heroines endowed with remarkable power for delivering the author's message against the patriarchal social system. In a *tanci* tale, *Yanzhixue* (Rouge Blood, by Zhou Shoujuan, 1908), the male author's Joan of Arc is modeled upon the legendary Mulan, who rises when the nation is in peril and commands thousands of male soldiers in the battlefield, with no one able to find out she is a woman. Similar *tanci* tales by men include Tale of a French Woman Hero (1904) by Wanlan ciren (挽瀾詞人), the pen name of Yu Chenglai (1881-1937), and Twentieth-Century *Tanci*: Light of Civilization in the Women's World (1911) by Zhong Xinqing. These male authors' tales of heroic Western women enriched Chinese women's conception of a universal womanhood and endeavored to cultivate women's political consciousness through the appropriation and modification of traditional *tanci*. The foreignness of these stories of Western women was addressed by native authors who applied traditional narrative strategies in Chinese vernacular fiction in their writing. These *tanci* envisioned an intersubjective relationship between native Chinese women and their Western counterparts, and renarrated stories of Western women as instructive stories for Chinese readers.

The late imperial and republican authors' efforts to renarrativize foreign heroines for the native audience, and to tell new stories with the old narrative form, suggest the enduring vitality of *tanci* during the process of China's transition toward modernity. Critic Jin Feng suggests that May Fourth writers forged an ambiguous relationship with popular fiction of the time. Many of them vigorously criticized popular literature and excluded works by popular writers from the canon of modern Chinese literature. However, the commercial success of popular fiction suggests that despite their vow to educate the masses, May Fourth intellectuals could not match the efforts of their lowbrow rivals in conveying the point of their narrative to a wider audience (Feng, Jin 17). Jiang's *tanci* poses an important question about the function of popular literature in the formation of modern Chinese literary tradition. Jiang's re-invigoration of traditional *tanci* in order to tell stories of new Chinese women creates a multivocal textual chorus between the old and the new, and extends the reception of new ideals of modern womanhood to audiences of popular literature. Jiang's New Woman is a medium-specific one; she is seen through the veil of the traditional; her predicated identity is none other than an emblem of the hybrid modern subjectivity.

Jiang's *tanci* facilitates the exploration of the interwar culture of consumption and spectacle by depicting women's experience of modern social transitions and by projecting ways of remaking themselves as historical and gendered subjects. The *tanci* provides a panoramic vision of women of diverse social classes, containing vivid depictions of the youthful, educated, and professional new modern women,
and minor women characters who stand in stark contrast with the idealized heroine. These minor heroines include the illiterate housemaid, the calculating matchmaker, the daughter of imperial officials, traditional housewives, concubines hanging out in hotels, and spoiled daughters of the rich who rely on fashion, tabloids, and shopping to pass time. Jiang's representation of the Western-educated Tanhua, when set against this backdrop of 1920s Shanghai, appeals to her contemporary audiences even more strongly. The union of the tanci genre and Jiang's profound social criticism grinds a realistic fictional lens which refracts contemporary discourses of women, modernity, and nation, as well as the tensions between these discursive explorations. While the old moral system collapses and makes way for the establishment of a new order, Jiang's characters demonstrate individual men and women, who, in searching for a new form of social existence, negotiate the distance between private acts and public culture. Sarah E. Stevens makes a distinction between the New Woman and the Modern Girl in the republican period. She notes, "The New Woman represents a positive view of linear modernity and hopes for a strong future China. The Modern Girl manifests in two distinct ways: as a self-absorbed woman searching for subjectivity and as a dangerous femme fatale who devours the urban male" (Stevens 83). Stevens argues that these archetypes of femininity reflect distinctively different and often opposing types of modernity. In the text, Tanhua's character is approximate to the New Woman, who represents the necessary transformation of the nation toward modernity. Qingjiao, by contrast, is close to the Modern Girl femme fatale image. The New Woman archetype is one "of revolutionary nature, devotion to the larger cause of nationalism, and a search to find self-identity which is inevitably bracketed within the larger nationalistic struggle" (Stevens 83). This archetype, however, does not fully represent the author Jiang Yingqing, nor her heroine Jia Tanhua, each of whom represents the strong legacy of the late imperial cainü writers.

Specifically, Jiang writes from the position of a modern professional woman author, educator, and activist, as well as from that of an accomplished traditional poet. Her subjective position is different from the positions of leftist writers who rose to power after the May Fourth Movement. Nor does she belong to a cadre of decadent writers such as Xin ganjue pai (新感覺派), or the New Perceptionists who portray the Modern Girl in order to express male disillusionment with modernity and their fears of alienation that accompany the urban, cosmopolitan world. The New Perceptionists represents an important school of fiction in the late 1920s and 1930s. Representative writers of this trend include Liu Na'ou (劉吶鷗, 1900-1940), Shi Zhecun (施蟄存, 1905-2004), and Mu Shiying (穆時英, 1912-1940). These authors, following their forerunners in Japan, demonstrate interest in exploring Freudian concepts of the unconscious, the dreamwish, and death drive (Larson 70; Wu Lichang 195). Different from female images in leftist and realist writings in the 1920s and 1930s, Tanhua's image resonates more resolutely with primordial tanci heroines such as Meng Lijun whose freedom comes from personal decision-making against encaging social circumstances. Jiang chooses traditional tanci as a vehicle for the portrayal of women's epochal feelings and China's urbanization process. Among her
peers, Jiang redefines the traditional identity of 才女 (cainü, a talented woman) to her own advantage. Even through the so-called cainü were often described as knowing nothing more than writing sentimental poetry, it was precisely the cainü type of woman who became most active in the political and educational reforms of the late Qing period (Qian, Fong, and Smith 9).

A favorable external condition for learned women's activism in the public sphere is the male intellectual's increasing need to witness the presence of women in the public sphere since the 1898 reform period. A pragmatic concern for the reformists is to encourage women to make their own living so that they would not burden the nation and be a cause of its continued backwardness (Qian, Fong, and Smith, Different Worlds 9). Any examination of the relation between gender and genre in the reform era must give attention to the lives and works of those women, both past and present, who were designated, or who identified themselves, as traditional cainü (9). This historical context underlies current study of Jiang Yingqing's public identity as a woman author of tanci, a poet, a head of a women's school, and an educational and social reformist. The protagonist Tanhua was born in Hangzhou, a city at the heart of the late imperial culture of talented women and home to the famous tanci author Chen Duansheng. Tanhua's life departs from this traditional cultural habitat to travel abroad, and then to the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai. Jiang Yingqing revisions Hangzhou as an environment which nourished a culture of talented women in the story space, and thus connects the textual representation of the modern heroine to precursory fictional and historical women in the same space. Likewise, Joan Judge points out that "the Chinese women question can be understood as the product of China's own distinct history" (Judge, Precious Raft 7). The "women question—how, or whether, to redefine female virtue, talent, and heroism within the modern world order—epitomizes the tensions between past and present, Chinese principles and Western practices, and Confucian ritual teachings and new ideas (Precious Raft 7). Judge and Fong's criticism share the common viewpoint that Chinese women's subjectivity needs to be grounded in China's specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. The discourse of cainü wenhua (才女文化), as an ongoing, expanding, and constantly changing narrative, has interpolated into the social, cultural codes about modern women's freedom, agency, and identity.

Jiang depicts women as historical and gendered subjects through a panoramic view of women of diverse social classes, including professional women, an illiterate housemaid, and a calculating matchmaker, in addition to housewives, concubines, and fashion girls. In comparison with Tanhua's character, which is endowed with narrative centrality, minor women characters expose the polemical question of femininity and its multiple manifestations in ordinary women's lives. Jiang's modern woman, veiled in a traditional narrative medium, is an emblem of the hybrid modern subjectivity. The modern woman is an agent of social enlightenment, the one who is destined to liberate the many from the obscurity of themselves. Jiang's representation of the female national citizen opens up new transformative possibilities of women's agency and displays a vigilant search for a bottom-up solution for the
meshing and reconciliation of women's personal subjectivity and their nationalistic ambition. The open ending of the heroine traveling overseas implies that the author might have directed her gaze toward searching for women's agency in transnational spheres outside China.

In conclusion, Jiang's portrayal of Jia Tanhua draws attention to the question of women's self-making and social agency, which is subjected to multiple social and historical discourses that are "different, changing . . . and even antipathetic to each other" (Dissanayake 10). The author's exploitation of modern print media to create a space for self-expression distinguishes her from earlier *tanci* writers, and transforms the traditional narrative genre of *tanci* into a form of profound social inquiry into women's careers, marriage, and social emancipation. Tanhua's pursuit of an independent life outside the family articulates an aspect of women's agency that is shared by contemporary women's activism, that is, that the formation of women's selfhood is shaped by their immediate historical and social conditions, and that women's social and political agency reflects their strategic self-making in response to such social conditions. Jiang's heroine Tanhua represents an ideal of individual agency achieved through her social commitment, self-sacrifice, and strategic identification with modern citizenship. Simultaneously, the author's exploration of multiple female subjectivities in the traditional *tanci* demonstrates proliferating understandings of modern womanhood, the possible linkages between feminist social activism instigated by the May Fourth cultural movement, and the foregoing late imperial protofeminist thinking. As Lydia Liu points out, "It is the incongruities, tensions, and struggles between selfhood and national identity, as well as their mutual implication and complicity, that give full meaning to the lived experience of Chinese modernity" (Liu, Lydia 10). The contrast, complexity, and coexistence of multiple female subjectivities in Jiang's *tanci*, as illustrated in this chapter, signal the contention and complicity of social discourses that influence and situate the various roles that individual women subsume. The vanguard heroine mirrors the author's understanding of female social mobility which lies beyond domestic spheres, and remains exempt from complete dependency on the master narratives of the nation and state in republican China.